

Toilet Learning

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Learning to use the potty is a big event in the lives of preschool children. Learning is a full-time job for children at this age, and learning to use the potty may not be as important as learning to climb, jump, run, and talk. Children learn this new skill at individual times of readiness. Patience and timing are important keys to success for parents. A calm, easygoing approach with a consistent plan and good communication works best. Remember that toilet training is something you cannot force, or it may become an unnecessary battle for control.

1. How can I know if my child is ready for toilet training?

There are several different signs that indicate a child is ready to begin toilet training. These include:

- Physical signs: Children can stay dry for several hours, get on and off the potty chair or toilet seat by themselves, and can pull their pants up and down with little help.
- Verbal signs: Children can name different parts of their body and tell parents when they need to use the potty.
- Following directions: Children are able to understand and follow directions.
- Motivation: Children are willing to cooperate in order to reach this big step in their lives.

2. At what age are most children toilet trained?

Most children are toilet trained between the ages of 2 and 3, although individual children mature at different rates. Girls generally learn toileting a few months earlier than boys.

3. What are the steps to teaching children to learn toileting?

- Watch for signs of readiness.
- Read books about potty training to help children understand the process.
- Borrow or buy a potty chair, steps, and/or attachment for the toilet. Place the new potty in the bathroom and tell children what it is for.
- Dress children in easy-to-remove pants to make the job easier for them.
- Encourage children to sit on the potty for a few minutes. When they succeed, praise them. If they do not succeed, reassure them: "We'll try again later. If you have the feeling that you need to go, let me know."
- Remind children to use the potty on a regular basis such as before and after naps, after dinner, and before bedtime. As children become used to the potty, they will use it on their own and need fewer reminders. This may take only a few days but more likely will take several months.

3. Suppose my child is afraid of flushing?

Children often respond to flushing in one of two ways--either they are fascinated by the process or scared. Children who enjoy flushing will enjoy watching everything flush away and may want to repeat the process again and again. Children who fear flushing will prefer their parents do the flushing. Make sure children are off the potty before flushing. Children may need reassurance that they are safe and that only their body wastes will be flushed away.

4. How should I react to mistakes during training?

Remember that mistakes are a part of the process of learning to use the potty. Treat them casually, offering your sympathy and support. It takes time for young children to learn this complex new skill.

Nighttime control generally comes later after daytime control so diapers may still be need for awhile for sleeping. Your child may regress during times of change, such as a moving to a new home or the birth of a new brother or sister.